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Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, which is submitted to the Economic and Social Council in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1823 (XVII) and Council resolution 1817 (LV), provides an update on the perspectives and developments in regional cooperation and the work of the regional commissions since the substantive session of the Council of 2007.

The report is organized in two chapters, the first of which provides regional perspectives on major issues on the global agenda, including a midpoint overview on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The overview recognizes progress made in the various regions, but also identifies gaps in implementation and underlines interregional, intraregional and rural-urban disparities in achieving a number of the goals. It underscores the threat posed by new challenges, notably the rising costs of food and energy, which may halt or reverse the progress achieved so far. The report also provides a regional review on the question of financing for development in advance of the Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development, which is to be held in Doha from 29 November to 2 December 2008. Priority issues and challenges relating to the six leading actions set out in the Monterrey Consensus, adopted at the first International Conference on Financing for Development, held in 2002, are highlighted as they pertain to specific regions. In addition, chapter I highlights a number of regional initiatives to address the challenges of climate change and promote South-South cooperation as a vehicle for development and for reducing disparities in all regions.

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Chapter II of the report provides an update on additional major policy issues of relevance to the respective regions that were discussed during the ministerial sessions of the regional commissions and at other high-level regional conferences and meetings. It also reviews the efforts by the commissions to strengthen and bring more coherence to the regional dimension of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, in line with General Assembly resolution 62/208. The chapter also offers a brief update on the interregional cooperation among the commissions, including through the regular meetings of the Executive Secretaries.

The resolutions and decisions adopted by the regional commissions during the period under review that require action by the Economic and Social Council or are brought to its attention will be issued as an addendum to the present report (E/2008/15/Add.1).

The summaries of the economic surveys and trends in the five regions are provided to the Council for its consideration. As they are released, the annual reports of the regional commissions for the period under review will be issued as supplements to the official records of the Economic and Social Council.

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I. Regional perspectives on the global agenda

A. Achieving the Millennium Development Goals: a midpoint regional overview

1. Most global, regional and national assessments, including those produced by the United Nations regional commissions in collaboration with United Nations and non-United Nations partners, point to a mixed performance and uneven progress in achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. This mixed performance is not only true interregionally, but also intraregionally, and often within the same country, with striking disparities between rural and urban areas in many instances.

2. As the world's most economically dynamic, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) region has made significant progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals. The achievements have been most impressive in reducing extreme poverty, providing universal primary education and improving gender inequality in access to education. The region as a whole is on track to reach the target of reducing extreme poverty by half. The proportion of people living below $1 a day in the region dropped from 32 per cent in 1990 to 17 per cent in 2004 — less than half of the poverty rate in sub-Saharan Africa (41 per cent) — helping 367 million people escape the misery of absolute poverty.

3. Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean also appear to be on track in meeting their commitment to halve the 1990 extreme poverty rate by 2015. The most recent estimates by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) show that some 15 million people in the region lifted themselves out of poverty during 2006, and that another 10 million were no longer destitute. For the first time since 1990, the total number of people living in poverty in the region dropped below 200 million, and in 2007, those numbers dropped even further.

4. By contrast, many reports published in the run-up to the midpoint for achievement of the Goals, including the 2008 report of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) on assessing progress in Africa towards the Millennium Development Goals show that the countries of the African continent are most unlikely to reach the Goals by the target date. The evidence presented in the ECA report and in other reports nevertheless indicates that there have also been positive developments in recent years and that progress is being made across the continent in a number of areas. In 2007, the number of people living in extreme poverty in sub-Saharan Africa levelled off, and the poverty rate has declined by nearly six percentage points since 2000. There have also been significant improvements in net enrolment ratio in primary education and in gender equality and women's empowerment, as shown by the fact that sub-Saharan Africa recorded the largest share of women in single or lower houses of parliament between 1990 and 2007.

5. There are, however, significant disparities within the same region and mixed success in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Moreover, emerging challenges, including rising food and energy prices, and the impact of climate change, imperil and threaten to reverse progress achieved towards some of the Goals. In this regard, the above-mentioned ECA assessment showed that in 46 African countries for which data were available there has been a clear decrease in

the proportion of people suffering from hunger, a situation exacerbated by drought and the heavy dependence on rain-fed agriculture in Africa.

6. Other regions find themselves in similar situations. In the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) region, for example, food security also emerged as a priority, with countries of the region, notably Egypt and Saudi Arabia, among the major importers of cereals in the world. In the ECLAC region, food consumer price indexes have risen in the majority of the regional economies at an annual rate of between 6 and 20 per cent, with an average of about 15 per cent during 2007. ECLAC estimates that the continuation of this trend will force another 15.7 million Latin Americans into destitution and a similar number to fall below the poverty line.

7. The intraregional disparities are also striking. For example, even in areas where the Asian and Pacific region as a whole is on track, there are countries and country groups that are lagging behind, a reality that is often masked by the regional average dominated by data received from large countries. Those with the greatest difficulties are often least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States. Many least developed countries, especially those in South Asia, are making slow progress, or even falling behind in some cases, in reducing extreme poverty, child hunger and the under-five mortality rate and in improving maternal health. South Asia also has some of the highest maternal mortality ratios in the world, with 188,000 maternal deaths yearly, 78 per cent of the estimated total maternal deaths in the entire Asia-Pacific region in 2005.

8. In the ESCWA region, while the member countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council and several Maghreb and Mashreq countries are on track to achieve most of the Millennium Development Goal targets, the least developed countries and conflict-ridden Iraq and Palestine lag significantly behind, making it unlikely that they will be able to meet the majority of the targets by 2015. Based on data for 12 countries in the region, representing 74 per cent of the region's total population, the proportion of population living below national poverty lines has remained at approximately 23 per cent. Among the least developed countries of the region, the poverty rates are almost double that rate. Due to ongoing conflict, there has been an enormous increase in poverty in Iraq and Palestine, with approximately one third of the population of Iraq and almost one half of the population of Palestine living in poverty. In Yemen, 45.6 per cent of children were underweight in 2003, compared to less than 4 per cent in other ESCWA member countries.

9. In the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region, income levels vary from well above $20,000 for Western Europe and North American countries, to as low as $2,000 for Moldova and $1,200 for Tajikistan. Consequently, while the Millennium Development Goal targets have largely been reached in the countries of North America and Western and Central Europe, a significant number of Goals will be difficult for most of the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia and South-Eastern Europe to reach. For example, while the region shows a decline in child mortality, international estimates suggest that in a number of countries in the above subregions the pace is not fast enough to achieve the target of reducing by two thirds the mortality rate among children under five by 2015. In the countries of Central Asia and Azerbaijan, for example, it is estimated that 6 to 10 children out of 100 do not reach five years of age.

10. In terms of mixed performance towards the various Millennium Development Goals, evidence suggests that progress in achieving universal primary education and the related target of gender parity in education has been a success to varying degrees in all regions. While most African countries are likely to reach gender parity by 2015, evidence also suggests that women across the regions remain more exposed to poverty and face more obstacles in overcoming it. For 12 countries in the ECLAC region for which information is available, the femininity index of poverty[1] had, up until 2002, a relatively stable average value of about 108.5 women for every 100 men. This ratio increased, however, in 2005, reaching 112 women for every 100 men. This situation occurs even in countries that do not have high absolute poverty levels. Similarly, the gains achieved by women in the ESCWA region in achieving access to education have not yet been translated into greater economic and political participation. In general, the share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector has remained constant, at 18 per cent, in all ESCWA subregions since 1990. The percentage of seats held by women in national parliaments in the region has increased only slightly since 1990, standing at 8.7 per cent in 2007, a figure among the lowest in the world.

Box 1
Measuring gender parity: the African gender development index

Gender is a cross-cutting element in most of the Millennium Development Goals, a fact which presents a challenge in the identification of comprehensive indicators that adequately capture progress on gender issues. To address the inadequacy of monitoring mechanisms and assist African Governments in tracking progress towards gender equality and women's advancement, ECA, through its African Centre for Gender and Social Development, has developed the African gender and development index. The index is a tool that maps the extent of gender inequality in Africa and assesses the performance of Governments in addressing the issue. Such an assessment of 12 African countries indicated that women's income in Africa is slightly more than half of that of men in most of those countries. When used to assess the performance of African countries in implementing international and regionally agreed commitments, the index revealed that Governments score high both in terms of ratifying and developing policies for gender equality, although their performance is rather poor when it comes to implementation.

11. Among the challenges across the regions is also the Millennium Development Goal of ensuring environmental sustainability, which is high on the agenda of the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council in 2008. From 1990 to 2005, land covered by forest decreased in sub-Saharan Africa by 3 per cent. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the proportion of land covered by forest diminished by 8.5 per cent during the same period, suggesting a worrisome trend in the region. Thanks to reforestation efforts in many countries, including Armenia, Azerbaijan,

[1] The index concerns women between 20 and 59 years of age living in urban areas. It is over 100 when women are overrepresented in the group of poor households.

China and Viet Nam, the Asia-Pacific region as a whole registered the same forest cover in 2005 as in 1990. However, some of the economic growth has been at the cost of rapid deforestation in other countries of the region.

12. In most regions, insufficient progress has been made to improve access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. The rural-urban gap is still wide, lowering national aggregate figures in countries of various regions. In the ECE region, the percentage of households reached by piped water in a number of countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Caucasus is usually more than 80 per cent in urban areas, but it is often very low in the country side. In 10 countries of the region, less than 30 per cent of rural dwellings have piped water, with a predictable impact on public health. With a decrease from 85 per cent in 1990 to 66 per cent in 2004, the Asia-Pacific region is currently off-track to achieve the target of reducing, by half, the proportion of people without access to basic sanitation in rural areas by 2015. In percentage terms, this puts the region far behind the ECLAC region (51 per cent in 2004) and close to sub-Saharan Africa (72 per cent in 2004). Despite the fact that 15 African countries have increased access to clean water in rural areas by 25 per cent, the changes are still too low for Africa to reach the target of halving the number of people without access to clean drinking water by 2015.

13. Across the regions, to varying degrees, the off-track countries or those that are making slow progress face several "gaps" in reaching the Millennium Development Goal targets by 2015: "growth gaps", "strategy gaps", "policy gaps", "implementation gaps", and "resource gaps".[2] These gaps are hampering progress towards achieving the Goals. There is strong evidence to suggest that absence of pro-poor economic growth, lack of Goal-based development strategies and policies, the failure to implement such strategies efficiently and the scarcity of adequate financial resources have impeded progress in this regard in many countries in all five regions.

14. For example, Africa's average annual growth rate of approximately 5.8 per cent remains significantly lower than the 7 per cent annual growth rate required to reduce poverty by half by 2015, indicating an important "growth gap". In the Asia-Pacific region, the national development plans of many off-track countries are not generally based on achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The implications of achieving Millennium Development Goal targets on public expenditures are seldom incorporated into national development strategies, and annual budgets do not contain specific allocations related to the targets and indicators, indicating a "strategy gap".

15. In the ECE region, while a general trend towards poverty reduction can be observed in countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, there is still a large sector of the population living in relative poverty, with a proportion living in absolute poverty (fixed at 2 United States dollars a day, taking into account the high heating costs). This is particularly true in the case of rural areas and for unemployed and unskilled labour, ethnic minorities, retired and elderly persons and persons with health problems. The high number of young women, single mothers, women living in large families and older women who are identified as poor is clear evidence of the

[2] See E/ESCAP/64/37. The gaps identified in the context of Asia-Pacific are applied across the regions in the context of the present report.

feminization of poverty. Addressing these "policy gaps", the difference between selected policy indicators, including gross domestic product (GDP) growth, social expenditure and financing, is therefore crucial to improving the ability of off-track countries to reach the Millennium Development Goal targets by 2015.

16. Off-track countries also face problems related to governance and implementing policies and strategies into effective actions on the ground. Lack of adequate resources to finance actions to achieve the Millennium Development Goals is also a clear and widening gap. For least developed countries in the Asia-Pacific region; for example, the financial resource gap to reach the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 could be as high as $8 billion annually. Addressing both the "implementation gaps" and the "resource gaps" faced by many countries in various regions indicates that all stakeholders, including Governments and the international community, need to make more concerted efforts in this regard. Fostering a global partnership for development, notably on the trade and financing for development agenda, is crucial to achieve the seven other Goals in the regions. The aggregate score card for all regions shows that the challenge of meeting the Goals, including in Africa, is not insurmountable if both national and international targeted policy measures are scaled up in a number of the critical areas. International cooperation to address and reduce the effect of rising food and energy prices on off-track countries is an urgent priority if the international community is to maintain the level of progress achieved thus far.

B. Financing for development: regional reviews

17. In its resolution 62/187, the General Assembly reiterated that the Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus, to be held in Doha in late 2008 should assess progress made, reaffirm goals and commitments, share best practices and lessons learned and identify obstacles and constraints encountered, actions and initiatives to overcome them, measures for further implementation, as well as new challenges and emerging issues. In the same resolution, the Assembly called upon the regional commissions to hold regional consultations, as appropriate, during the first half of 2008, to serve as inputs to the preparations for the Review Conference.

18. In response, the regional commissions held their regional consultations on financing for development from April through June 2008. During the consultations, for which the commissions prepared background studies and documents, the specificity, priority areas and challenges for each region were emphasized. At the same time gaps in the implementation of the Monterrey Consensus across the regions, albeit with varying degrees and emphasis, were revealed.

19. Mobilizing domestic resources for development remains a challenge in the developing countries in the regions. This is particularly true in the ECA region, where macroeconomic data show that the average annual savings-to-GDP ratio increased only slightly, from 19 per cent in the pre-Monterrey period to 22 per cent in the post-Monterrey period (see table 1). Low savings rates are also recorded in the ECLAC region and in the Central, Eastern and South-Eastern European countries where savings rates averaged less than 20 per cent of GDP. By contrast, the average savings rate in developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region increased from 33.6 per cent in 2002 to 43.5 per cent in 2006. The average savings rate in the newly developed Asian economies increased from 29.8 per cent to 31.6 per cent

during the same period, although much of that increase in savings was concentrated in a few countries. Banking infrastructure and governance need to be improved and potential capital markets need to be harnessed for resource mobilization, notably in the ECA and ECLAC regions.

Table 1
Selected macroeconomic indicators for Africa

Indicator (In percentages unless otherwise indicated)	*Pre-Monterrey (1998-2001)*	*Post-Monterrey (2002-2005)*
Overall		
Economic growth	3.3	4.0
Inflation	11.8	9.2
Domestic resources		
Savings/GDP	19.0	22.0
Investment/GDP	19.7	20.1
International resources		
FDI[a]	11.9	18.1
FDI/GDP	2.1	2.4
Trade		
Real export growth	3.7	4.9
Exports/GDP	29.0	33.0
Cooperation		
ODA[a]	16	28
External debt		
Debt[a]	274.0	293.0
Debt/GDP	62.0	47.0
Total debt service/GDP	5.9	4.4

Sources: *ECA (2007); World Bank (2007); Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2007).*

[a] Billions of United States dollars.

20. The experience of the emerging economies in the ECE region suggests that the development of financial institutions may not, in and of itself, provide the hoped for economic stimulus. Significant progress has been made in developing banking institutions in the ECE region, but these financial entities have tended to borrow from abroad instead of significantly promoting domestic savings, and have focused on consumer loans and real estate investment instead of investing in more development-oriented activities. Inclusive finance and improved financial intermediation to increase the access of rural poor households and small firms to financial services is needed in most developing and emerging economies.

21. Foreign direct investment (FDI) continues to be among the most important sources of financing for development. In general, since the Monterrey conference in 2002, there has been an increase in the flow of FDI to the various regions. For instance, the net FDI flows to Africa increased from an average of $11.9 billion in the pre-Monterrey period to $18.1 billion in the post-Monterrey period. However,

despite the fact that macroeconomic stability has improved in many African countries and policies have been introduced to attract private capital flows, FDI in sub-Saharan Africa is low in comparison to other developing subregions.

22. Inflows of FDI to the ESCWA region grew significantly post-Monterrey, reaching $49 billion in 2006. Investment rates in the member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the non-European Union countries in South-east Europe and the 12 new member States of the European Union were in the range of 20 to 25 per cent of GDP, compared to an average of 2.4 per cent in Africa. Investment, including FDI, remains a primary engine for economic growth and social development in Asia-Pacific developing countries, with the FDI flow to the region having increased substantially over the last few years.

23. The flow of FDI is, however, concentrated in a few countries and/or is largely targeted at the natural resources sector. This is true both in Africa and in the energy-rich countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, as well as in the Asian and Pacific region, where China and Singapore together account for almost 50 per cent of the inflow to the region. In the same time, outward FDI flow from Asia-Pacific developing countries and other regions is increasing. In the ESCWA region, FDI outflows in 2005 from the six States of the Gulf Cooperation Council totalled $14 billion, as compared to the combined FDI inflows to Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, which reached $10 billion. Enhanced regional cooperation could help reduce disparities within the regions, including through improvement of the investment climate, leading to more FDI to the poorer countries in all regions.

24. Strengthened regional cooperation is also needed in order to help address financing gaps that FDI flows are unable to fill. Financing for infrastructure development is a case in point. Despite the richness of its financial resources, the Asian and Pacific region is facing a large infrastructure financing gap, estimated at $200 billion a year, while only 3.5 per cent of the total amount of private investment in infrastructure to developing countries between 1990 and 2003 went to countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Regional mechanisms could be established either by strengthening the existing mechanisms or developing new institutions to mobilize regional and international resources for infrastructure development. Regional cooperation could also assist countries in strengthening their institutional and policy environment for the development of vibrant and deeper capital markets, as well as the development of instruments or mechanisms for financial risk management, notably in view of the increased volatility of financial markets. The ECE region attained a high level of economic integration through several subregional agreements, including through the European Union, the Central European Free Trade Agreement and the Eurasian Economic Community. Pan-European economic integration has attracted capital to the region, promoting increased domestic and intraregional investment, and providing a good example for other regions.

25. In the countries of the Asian and Pacific region, in particular the countries of East and South-East Asia, the link between trade and development has been clearly demonstrated. The region has benefited from the multilateral trading system, which has contributed to lifting millions of people out of poverty. For example, developing countries in the region have nearly tripled their share of world trade since 1990. By contrast, Africa's trade position remains marginal, with its share of global merchandise exports in 2006 standing at 2.8 per cent and its share of global export

of services at 2.4 per cent, although, as a result of increasing commodity prices, the export sector is now growing stronger in the region. The average ratio of exports to GDP also increased in the post-Monterrey period (see table 1).

26. Whether in Africa, the Asia-Pacific or other regions, more opportunities could be presented under a more liberalized multilateral trade regime of the World Trade Organization. Regional and bilateral trade agreements continue to liberalize trade faster than multilateral trade agreements, but they are less efficient in net trade creation. It is therefore vital that the Doha Round of trade negotiations deliver on its development agenda promises. Operationalizing the Aid for Trade initiative is needed in order to help African and other developing countries, notably the least developed, to maximize the benefits of liberalized trade by addressing supply constraints, issues relating to upgraded transport policies and infrastructure, trade facilitations, enhanced institutional capacity, better standards testing facilities, more reliable energy sources and supplies and information and communications technology (ICT) networks. With only a 7 per cent share of the total Aid for Trade flow in 2005, the ECLAC region is lagging behind the ESCAP and ECA regions, which received, respectively, 50 and 30 per cent.

27. Official development assistance continues to be a vital source of resources for countries in the ECA region, in particular those without the capacity to attract private capital. As a consequence of recent commitments and a stronger engagement, ODA to Africa has increased to an average of $28 billion over the period from 2002 to 2005 (see table 1). Donors are still not on track to meet their commitments, however, and recent aid flows tend to concentrate in a few countries and social sectors (emergency aid and debt relief). There is a need to increase allocation to the productive sectors and to scale up efforts to improve aid effectiveness. The inflow of ODA to the recipient countries of the ESCWA region has declined in almost all cases, except Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine. Total ODA flows to the ESCAP region have declined from 0.9 per cent of the total GDP of countries in the region in 1990 to 0.3 per cent in 2005, although in absolute terms it has increased from $15 billion to $20 billion. On average, for the period from 1980 to 2004, the shares of ODA for countries in the ECLAC region held fairly steady at between 11 and 8 per cent, on average, of total ODA flows. The decline in ODA to most middle-income countries in the regions requires a more effective utilization of aid in these countries and reveals the need for those countries to improve the investment environment in order to attract private capital. Donor countries also need to increase their efforts to reach the goal of allocating 0.7 per cent of their GDP to ODA.

28. Remittances sent home by migrant workers from developing countries are estimated to have reached more than $200 billion in 2006, more than twice the level of development assistance from all sources., This fact underpins the growing importance of remittances as a significant source of external finance. Of the top five remittance-earning countries in the world in 2006, three, India ($24.7 billion), China ($22.5 billion) and the Philippines ($14.9 billion), are in the Asia-Pacific region. For many countries in the region, remittances now far exceed FDI and ODA received. The vital importance of remittances is also recognized in many countries in the ECLAC region and in some recipient countries in the ESCWA region. While remittances are private funds, and therefore should not be seen as substitutes for development assistance, they are, however, an important source of external finance with great potential for development impact. There is growing evidence to suggest

that remittances play a crucial role in reducing household poverty through increased consumption and investments in housing, health and education. They also foster entrepreneurship by facilitating the formation of small businesses by other members of households. Greater regional and international cooperation is needed in order to facilitate the flow of remittances, in particular to overcome technical barriers to money transfer and high transaction costs and to further tap into the potential large benefits of temporary migration for both the host countries and home countries.

29. As a result of the debt-relief efforts under the auspices of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Initiative and the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative, the debt-to-GDP ratio in Africa dropped from an average of 62 per cent in the pre-Monterrey period to 47 per cent in the post-Monterrey period (see table 1). Debt levels are still high, however, and difficulties are faced by countries not part of the debt initiative in meeting their debt obligations and mobilizing resources to finance their development. During the first joint annual meeting of the African Union Conference of Ministers of Economy and Finance and the ECA Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, the ministers called for more flexibility in the eligibility criteria for debt relief. Three Asia-Pacific countries (Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan and Nepal) are also likely to benefit from the debt initiative.

C. Climate change: regional initiatives

30. It has been said that the vast majority of those most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change are also the least responsible for contributing to it in the form of green house gas emissions. This is true in the ECA, ECLAC and ESCWA regions and in the case of the poorest countries in Asia-Pacific. Yet while Africa contributes only about 3.8 per cent of total green house gas emissions, the countries of the continent are among the most vulnerable to the impact of climate change. African economies depend largely on agriculture, fisheries, forestry and tourism, which are particularly vulnerable to environmental changes.

31. Similarly, the ESCWA region contributes only around 3 per cent to the world's carbon dioxide emissions, while it is expected to suffer, among other consequences, from the rise in sea water levels, which threaten to inundate large parts of the most fertile agriculture lands of the Nile Delta in Egypt and Shatt-al-Arab in Iraq, as well as from reduced precipitation in the Mediterranean basin and in the upstream countries that supply almost 80 per cent of the renewable freshwater to the region.

32. While the ECLAC region does not contribute heavily to global energy emissions, several reports have shown that the economies and populations of Central America and the Caribbean countries are at risk as the result of disasters that, increasingly, are being attributed to climate change. Such disasters also threaten many countries in the ESCAP region, as demonstrated by events in May 2008, when Cyclone Nargis devastated Myanmar and an earthquake measuring 8 on the Richter scale struck Sichuan province in China. According to the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, worldwide, about 79 per cent of the fatalities caused by disasters occur in Asia-Pacific.

33. In the ESCAP region, priority is being given to multi-hazard disaster risk reduction, including through the use of the Multi-Donor Voluntary Trust Fund on Tsunami Early Warning Arrangements in the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia,

which is administered by the commission, to support projects in the development of tsunami advisory services, warning dissemination, dedicated disaster communication systems, capacity-building in standard operating procedures and community-based hazard mapping. These efforts are aimed at ensuring a coordinated approach in building and enhancing tsunami early warning system capacities at regional, subregional and national levels.

Box 2

Interregional cooperation for disaster assessment and risk reduction

With disasters increasingly attributed to climate change, the regional commissions are stepping up their interregional cooperation for disaster assessment and risk reduction. Thanks to ongoing collaboration between ECLAC and the World Bank, and building on the ECLAC methodology to assess the socio-economic costs of disasters, experts from the commissions met in a seminar hosted in Santiago in May 2008 to discuss the establishment of an interregional network specialized in disaster assessment and risk reduction. This promising initiative aims to contribute to the building up of regional and national institutional capacities in this field.

34. As in most complex transboundary development challenges, some mitigation and adaptation initiatives to face more effectively with the impact of climate change are better implemented on a regional scale but require regional coordination. This is particularly so with regard to the socio-economic impact assessment of climate change including: adaptation costs; social vulnerability; public policies, including those aiming to improve the carbon intensity performance of economies and harmonize climate-related actions with economic growth; energy security; water and land resources management; and combating environmental degradation.

35. The Asia-Pacific region, with two thirds of the world's poor, faces serious challenges in harmonizing climate actions with prevalent rapid economic growth, which reduces poverty. ESCAP has been promoting "green growth" as a regional approach for achieving sustainable development. The green growth approach aims to improve the ecological quality of economic growth through addressing key policy areas, such as green tax and budget reform, sustainable infrastructure, greening business, sustainable consumption and production and development of eco-efficiency indicators. As part of its efforts, ESCAP, in coordination with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), organized a subregional consultation on the sidelines of the Climate Change Talks held in Bangkok from 31 March to 4 April 2008 under the auspices of the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which are to be followed by another consultation with North-East Asian countries. The consultations were aimed at initiating a subregional dialogue among member States on key components of the Asia-Pacific perspective, to be reflected in the follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Climate Change, including the development of mechanisms for promoting the active participation of Asia-Pacific developing countries in the global green house gas mitigation actions, innovative options for a post-2012 climate action framework and an effective approach to promoting national mitigation and adaptation actions in the context of sustainable development through regional

cooperation. To promote policy options, ESCAP is collaborating with the Government of Japan on the establishment of the "Asia-Pacific gateway to climate and development", a web-based knowledge management tool on policy options for maximizing socio-economic and environmental co-benefits of climate change mitigation action and mainstreaming climate change adaptation into national development planning.

36. In response to calls by the African Heads of State and Government and their expressed concerns on the vulnerability of Africa's socio-economic and productive systems to climate change and variability and the continent's low mitigation and response capacities, ECA has partnered with the African Union Commission and the African Development Bank to develop and implement, in collaboration with relevant regional and international institutions, a major climate information for development in Africa programme, with a view to promoting and supporting the integration of climate risk management into pertinent policy and decision-making processes and sectoral practices throughout the continent. The overall purpose of the programme is to mainstream climate risk management in sensitive sectors of the economy. The programme specifically aims to achieve tangible results in the following areas: (a) policies: political engagement of African States in managing climate risk to assist development and adaptation to climate change; (b) practices: improvement of agriculture and food security, water resources, health, energy and environment in African countries through better climate risk management; (c) services: adequate information services provided to relevant stakeholders (public sector, private sector and civil society) for the full range of climate risk management practices required to deliver the desired development outcomes in all countries; and (d) data and infrastructure: improved data and analytical products for sectoral climate risk management, monitoring climate variability and climate change, with strengthened observation networks and service centres in Africa.

37. ECLAC has been collaborating with countries from the region to promote regional cooperation and the adoption of an integrated approach to climate change mitigation and adaptation. Activities include collaboration with international efforts to replicate the economic assessment carried out in the "Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change" for several countries and subregions. In addition, ECLAC was in charge of a pre-feasibility study for Central America that was presented at the Extraordinary Summit of Heads of State of the subregion on climate change that took place on 29 May 2008 and is also teaming up with Governments and other relevant stakeholders in carrying out assessments for Brazil and countries of the Caribbean. On a related initiative, ECLAC and the Andean Community assisted Andean countries in the elaboration of a document on the impact of climate change in those countries. The document was discussed at the Fifth Summit of Heads of State and Government of Latin America and the Caribbean and Europe, held in Lima, on 18 May 2008. ECLAC is supporting the development of programmatic projects for the clean development mechanism, particularly those dealing with urban sustainability, and has been supporting national and regional exchanges on ways to reduce emissions caused by deforestation and forest degradation.

38. With the support of ESCWA, and through coordination with the League of Arab States and the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP)/Regional Office for West Asia, a number of initiatives were undertaken by the countries in the region, including the adoption and progressive implementation of the Arab Initiative on Sustainable Development in 2002, the Abu Dhabi Declaration on Energy and

Environment in 2003 and the Arab Ministerial Declaration on Climate Change in 2007. All of these initiatives include and promote climate change adaptation and mitigation measures, with the latter emphasizing, in particular: the inclusion of policies to deal with climate change issues in all sectors within national and regional policies for sustainable development; the adoption of national and regional action plans dealing with climate change issues; and mitigation programmes focusing on the production and use of cleaner fuels, improving the efficiency of energy use in all sectors and diversifying energy sources in accordance with the prevailing economic and social conditions. Coordinated efforts by ESCWA, the League of Arab States and UNEP contributed to the adoption by Arab countries of policies related to energy efficiency labelling, the clean development mechanism and energy efficiency building codes. Action is also ongoing to formulate an Arab climate change adaptation and mitigation strategy. In addition, ESCWA assists member countries in the preparation and implementation of integrated water resources management strategies and promotes the sustainable use and management of water resources as part of its contribution to climate change adaptation efforts in the region.

39. Currently, green house gas emissions resulting from transport are highest in the ECE countries, where they account for 30 per cent of the carbon dioxide emissions of the Member States. In the vast majority of countries, the major share of polluting emissions is attributable to road transport. The ECE World Forum for Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations is currently investigating alternative fuels of the future, for example, liquid petroleum gas, natural gas, hydrogen and biofuels, and is discussing new regulations for vehicle technologies that have the potential to offer significant energy savings, including electric and hybrid vehicles, intelligent transport systems and gear-shift indicators. The World Forum recently decided to focus on the harmonization not only of vehicle regulations but also of fuel quality standards. A number of other ECE environmental conventions also promote adaptation and mitigation policies and measures and foster regional cooperation. The Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution and its related protocols and the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes and its Protocol on Water and Health are two examples in this regard.

Box 3

Promoting an energy efficiency market in Eastern Europe

Through its Energy Efficiency 21 project, ECE is promoting the formation of an energy efficiency market in Eastern Europe so that cost-effective investments can provide a self-financing method of reducing global green house gas emissions, including through a subproject, initiated in May 2007, on financing energy efficiency investments for climate change mitigation, which is supported by several partners. This initiative was designed to promote the formation of a market for energy efficiency in 12 Eastern European, South-Eastern European and Central Asian countries to reduce green house gas emissions, including through capacity-building and the provision of finance for bankable projects to reduce carbon dioxide emissions through a $250 million public-private partnership equity fund managed by external professional fund managers.

D. South-South cooperation: a vehicle for development and reducing disparities in the regions

40. The emergence of a new South as a powerful economic force is apparent. In all regions, pivotal countries or groups of countries, promising driving forces in their regions, are providing strong support to South-South cooperation.

41. With the world's fastest growing economies located in the Asia-Pacific region, South-South cooperation has assumed a new dynamism. In 2007, rapid growth in Asia-Pacific trade continued. Regional exports jumped by 17.5 per cent on a year-to-year basis in 2006, while imports grew by 15.5 per cent. While the United States of America and the European Union have continued to be the major export markets for most developing countries in the region, an increasing share of exports is destined for other Asian developing countries, in particular the booming economies of China and India, which are boosting intraregional trade. In parallel to the Doha Round of trade negotiations, the countries of the region have pursued regional and bilateral trade agreements as a complementary strategy for trade liberalization.

Box 4
Regional trade agreements: a useful tool for promoting regional cooperation and integration

According to the ESCAP Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Agreements Database, there were over 130 regional and bilateral trade agreements involving ESCAP members at the end of 2007, compared with 49 in 2000 and 18 in 1990. Viewed as "second best" to the multilateral trading system, regional trade agreements can be a very useful tool for promoting regional cooperation and integration, although the net impact of regional trade agreements on trade creation is not always positive and many remain unratified and unimplemented.

42. There are also regional trade agreements with partners within and outside of the region that have the potential to lead rule-setting and future trade trends. One such regional trade agreement is the Asia-Pacific Trade Agreement, whose secretariat is ESCAP. The Agreement is the only one of its kind that groups the leading economies of China, India and the Republic of Korea with that of Sri Lanka and two least developed countries, Bangladesh and the Lao People's Democratic Republic. The members have committed themselves to expanding membership in the Agreement so that it may evolve into a truly Pan-Asia-Pacific trade agreement and a principal modality for South-South cooperation and regional integration. The Agreement is open to all ESCAP developing countries that are members of the Commission. Discussions are under way with a number of countries, including countries in ASEAN, Central Asia and the Pacific, on their possible accession to the Agreement.

43. Intraregional trade grew in other regions as well. For example, intraregional trade among ESCWA member States, excluding trade in crude oil, is estimated to have increased from $20,963.6 million in 1997 to $31,630.3 million in 2003, registering an increase in its share of total trade from 11 per cent in 1997 to 15.3 per cent in 2003. More significantly, intraregional trade among members of the Gulf Cooperation Council

Customs Union witnessed an increase in both imports and exports, registering an increase of 304.8 percent in exports during the period from 1994 to 2005. In January 2008, the States of the Gulf Cooperation Council launched their joint common market after having agreed on all basic requirements and preparations over the period since the 2002 summit in Doha. In the ECE region, the particular emergence of a richer Russian Federation may open up market opportunities for several of the transition economies of the region, especially those of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. In 2006, for example, imports to those countries from the Russian Federation accounted for 16 per cent of the total and intraregional imports accounted for another 30 per cent. ESCWA and ECE, like the other regional commissions, support such trends through trade facilitation and the provision of trade-related technical assistance and data.

44. The potential of South-South Cooperation as a vehicle for development and disparity reduction within and among regions goes beyond trade. For instance, ECLAC is providing support to regional integration and macroeconomic policy coordination among the Andean Community, Central America and Mercosur through the Macroeconomic Policy Dialogue Network. This regional network, composed of central bankers and high-level authorities of the ministries of finance of the countries of the region, fosters macroeconomic dialogue and the exchange of good practices among policymakers on, inter alia, fiscal aspects of economic convergence, debt management and the role of regional reserve funds. Recently the emphasis has been on topics such as fiscal harmonization, macroeconomic asymmetries and regional financial markets. As a result of networking, a working group on macroeconomics was established within the framework of the Central American chapter of the Network to support the technical work of the Monetary Policy Committee of the Central American Monetary Council.

45. Technology transfer appears to be another promising area for South-South cooperation. The Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology, a regional institution of ESCAP, contributes to knowledge-based networking for development through established technology transfer networks in the Asia-Pacific region. The Centre promotes South-South cooperation for environmentally sound technology transfer and partnership-building with international organizations and national stakeholders. The regional commissions are also following up on the implementation of regional plans of action for the information society, promoting, through the process, mutually complementary and coherent strategies and programmes for ICT-related South-South technology transfer.

Box 5

A technology centre for development in the Arab region

ESCWA is working on the establishment of a technology centre for development, whose mission is to assist public and private organizations within ESCWA member States, through South-South cooperation, to attain technological parity with other nations and regions and to acquire the necessary tools to accelerate socio-economic development. The technology centre is to work closely with existing national and regional centres. To ensure that technological acquisitions become an integral part of the national and regional economy, the acquisition of new technologies will be undertaken by the national firms and organizations, rather than by the centre.

46. Several other examples exist for intraregional and interregional South-South cooperation in the ECA and other regions. Egypt, for example, through its Fund for Technical Cooperation with Africa, has implemented over 45 development projects and provided humanitarian assistance to at least 30 African countries. The new flow of investments and development assistance to Africa from countries like China and India is another example of interregional South-South cooperation. Similarly, Arab multilateral and bilateral development banks and funds have contributed over $80 billion in development assistance over the last three decades to developing countries within and outside the Arab world. In 2005, at the Second South Summit, Qatar announced that it would establish and host the "South Fund for Development and Humanitarian Assistance" and pledged $20 million to assist the countries of the South in their developmental efforts in economic, social, health and educational development, and to address the problems of hunger, poverty and human catastrophes. In much of these social development areas, the regional commissions are partnering with other United Nations and non-United Nations organizations to help the recipient countries in building the national and regional capacities needed to optimize the use of these new resources.

II. Developments in other selected areas of regional and interregional cooperation

A. Additional policy issues addressed by the regional commissions at their ministerial sessions and other high-level meetings

47. The regional commissions actively considered most of the issues highlighted in section I of the present report during high-level meetings or annual ministerial sessions held since the 2007 substantive session of the Council. During the period under consideration, four of the regional commissions (ECA, ESCAP, ESCWA and ECLAC) held their annual or biennial ministerial sessions and ECE organized a number of area-specific ministerial-level meetings, at which major policy issues of relevance to the respective regions were discussed.

48. ECA held its first joint annual meeting of the African Union Conference of Ministers of Economy and Finance and the ECA Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (Addis Ababa, 31 March-2 April 2008). The meeting, which was preceded by a joint expert meeting from 26 to 29 March 2008, was the first of its kind since the African Union and ECA decided to hold joint meetings of ministers as part of their renewed strategic partnership to better assist the African countries in meeting their sustainable development challenges. The meeting also presented an opportunity to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of ECA. In a special declaration, the ministers recognized the history of the Commission's significant achievements in the discharge of its mandate to promote the economic and social development of its member States, foster regional integration and promote international cooperation for Africa's development. The ministers also acknowledged the important role that the Commission must continue to play in helping to address Africa's socioeconomic challenges and advance the integration agenda.

49. The main theme of the first joint meeting was "Meeting Africa's new challenges in the twenty-first century". In their interactive dialogue, African

ministers underscored the need to implement strategies to achieve sustained, shared and broad-based growth in order to accelerate progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and effectively confront the challenges of the new century. The ministers reiterated their commitment to make employment creation an explicit and central objective of their economic and social policies for sustainable growth and poverty alleviation at the national, regional and continental levels. The issue of rising oil and food prices was widely debated. The ministers committed themselves to taking vigorous measures to implement all the pillars of the comprehensive African agricultural development programme. The African Union Commission and the African Development Bank were urged to finalize, as soon as possible, the feasibility study on the creation of an African oil fund in order to provide assistance to low-income and oil-importing countries in Africa. The importance of regional integration for advancing Africa's development agenda and accelerating progress through the New Partnership for Africa's Development and other initiatives, including the rationalization of the regional economic communities, was underlined. Renewed commitments were also made to scale up efforts to promote regional infrastructure development and intra-African trade. A number of resolutions on the above and other policy issues, including on the African Charter for Statistics, strengthening research and development and innovation in Africa and the ECA strategic framework for 2010-2011 were adopted at the meeting.

50. The theme of the sixty-fourth session of ESCAP, held in Bangkok from 24 to 30 April 2008, was "Energy security and sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific". Referring to a comprehensive study (E/ESCAP/64/34), delegations deliberated a number of issues, including energy efficiency, pricing, taxation systems, infrastructure financing, renewable and alternative energy sources, intraregional and subregional energy trade, energy sector governance and a trans-Asian energy system. Participants also discussed emerging social issues such as international migration and development for least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States in follow-up to the request, made by the Commission at its 63rd session, that a high-level meeting on international migration and development be convened in close coordination with related international organizations on migration, preferably in 2008. The Commission secretariat has commenced discussion with some Governments and international and intergovernmental organizations on possible collaborative activities in this regard.

51. The session reviewed progress in the regional implementation of selected global and regional commitments and implementation by the ESCAP secretariat of resolutions relating to emerging social issues. In this regard, during the reporting period, ESCAP organized a regional workshop to further promote "accessible tourism", that is, tourism that benefits not only the tourism sector but also persons with disabilities, older persons and families with young and older members. ESCAP organized the High-level Meeting on the Regional Review of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing in Macao, China, from 9 to 11 October 2007, at which remaining gaps and proposed solutions to ageing issues in the region, such as resource mobilization and the strengthening of knowledge, expertise and capability for effectively implementing plans and policies, were identified. The Commission adopted its resolution 64/5 on the establishment of the Forum of Asian Ministers of Transport as a formal regional mechanism to facilitate close collaboration and more frequent interaction, notably in view of the entry into force

of the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network in July 2005 and the expected entry into force of the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway Network in 2008. The Commission's efforts to support countries with special needs, including through the regional mid-term review of the Almaty Programme of Action and the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia, as well as its promotion of inter-country energy cooperation to benefit least developed countries in the Asia-Pacific region were also reviewed.

52. The meeting of the Special Body on Pacific Island Developing Countries was held just before the sixty-fourth session of ESCAP, on 22 and 23 April 2008. The Special Body was apprised of the outcome of consultative meetings organized by ESCAP and the Pacific Islands Forum secretariat and hosted by the Government of New Caledonia in Noumea on 12 and 13 March 2008. Under the theme of "Promoting Asia-Pacific linkages through regional cooperation", Pacific leaders and senior ministers and heads of subregional organizations and Pacific intergovernmental entities explored ways to strengthen ESCAP programmes in the Pacific and identified possible areas for cooperation between Pacific island developing countries and ASEAN. In follow-up, ESCAP has initiated action to strengthen the voice of Pacific island States in the Commission, including through regional arrangements on South-South cooperation and institutional modalities. The secretariat will also undertake a review of Pacific progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals and other key internationally agreed development frameworks in order to assist Pacific island developing countries in identifying policy options.

53. ESCWA held its twenty-fifth session from 26 to 29 May 2008 in Sanaa, with "Financing for development in the ESCWA region" as the theme for the ministerial discussions. Other issues discussed in chapter I above were also on the agenda. In addition, the session deliberated means to strengthen the national statistical capacities of member countries, for which the secretariat prepared a background document on ways to strengthen the role of national statistical organizations in applying the basic principles of official statistics issued by the United Nations. Progress towards the establishment of an Arabic language centre at ESCWA was also discussed, based on the outcome of an expert group meeting on the topic that was held in Beirut on 2 and 3 May 2007, with a view to defining the nature, goals and activities of the centre. The session also reviewed the outcome of the evaluation of 18 sessions of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies.

54. The main theme of the thirty-second session of ECLAC, held in Santo Domingo from 9 to 13 June 2008, was "Structural change and productivity growth — 20 years later: old problems, new opportunities". The secretariat prepared a report, debated in a seminar, which placed emphasis on diversification of production and innovation and on public-private alliances for establishing a medium and long-term strategy for furthering development in the region. During the session, and as part on the regional consultations on financing for development, a high-level panel on gender and financing was organized by the Secretary of State for Women's Affairs of the Dominican Republic and the ECLAC secretariat. The secretariat also presented the outcomes of the Second Regional Intergovernmental Conference on Ageing in Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Brasilia in December 2007, and the forty-sixth session of the Commission for Social Development, held in New York in February 2008. In that context, member countries identified specific activities to be carried out by ECLAC in the next two years. That process was

facilitated by a document prepared by the secretariat on demographic transformations and their influence on development in Latin America and the Caribbean, in which up-to-date information on demographic trends in Latin America and the Caribbean were made available to member countries in order to assist them in identifying the main challenges to development in the region in a situation marked by rapid and intense demographic change.

55. The sixtieth anniversary of the Commission, in 2008, will be celebrated in a series of special activities throughout the year. One highlight was the high-level seminar, "ECLAC at 60: visions of Latin America and the Caribbean", held in Santiago, on 28 April. The event was attended by renowned scholars and included two round-table discussions featuring a number of former Presidents from the region and several former Executive Secretaries of ECLAC. The President of Chile, the guest of honour, concluded the event. Other celebratory activities include the release of a new publication reviewing highlights of this United Nations Commission's sixty-year history and a complementary text on the intellectual contributions and influence of ECLAC staff and collaborators to the formulation of public policies.

56. The biennial session of ECE will be held in 2009. In 2008, ECE addressed four major policy areas through ministerial-level conferences. Participants in the Ministerial Conference on Ageing, held in León, Spain, in November 2007, discussed progress achieved in the implementation of the Regional Implementation Strategy of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing 2002 and adopted a ministerial declaration, entitled "A society for all ages: challenges and opportunities", which reaffirmed the commitment of member States to implement the regional strategy. The issue of promoting environmental protection and sustainable development in the region was addressed at the Sixth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" in Belgrade, held in October 2007. The conference provided for continuation of the work on multilateral environmental agreements, environmental monitoring and assessment and the environmental performance review programme. Ministers and heads of delegation also voiced unanimous support for a reform to strengthen the effectiveness of the "Environment for Europe" process and to ensure that it remains aligned with the needs and priorities of ECE member countries. The ECE Committee on Environmental Policy is developing a reform plan in close consultation with member States and other stakeholders.

57. In the area of timber and forestry, the Fifth Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe was held in Warsaw in November 2007 on the theme "Forests for quality of life". It reviewed a comprehensive assessment of the state of Europe's forests and adopted a ministerial declaration and two resolutions containing commitments on the promotion of wood as a renewable raw material and a renewable energy carrier and the close interrelationship between forests and water in the context of climate change for implementation at a national level. In the transport area, the Ministers of Transport from European and Asian countries met in February 2008 at the seventieth session of the ECE's Inland Transport Committee to discuss numerous transport and transit problems and ways to overcome them. They reaffirmed their support for the development of Euro-Asian transport links by signing a ministerial declaration and endorsed the Euro-Asian routes identified in a joint ECE/ESCAP report and supported the creation of a mechanism to ensure coordination and monitoring of future activities.

B. Operational activities for development: the regional dimension

58. The General Assembly, in its resolution 62/208 on the triennial comprehensive policy review on operational activities for development, requested the regional commissions to further develop their analytical capacities to support country-level development initiatives and to support measures for more intensive inter-agency collaboration at the regional and subregional levels. The Assembly also called upon the organizations of the United Nations development system and the regional commissions to intensify their cooperation and to adopt more collaborative approaches to support country-level development initiatives, in particular through closer collaboration with the resident coordinator system and by improving access to the technical capacities of the United Nations system at the regional and subregional levels.

59. During the reporting period, the regional commissions have intensified their efforts in this regard at all levels, in line with the requests of the General Assembly. At the global level, in October 2007 the regional commissions signed a cooperation framework agreement with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to optimize their comparative advantages and seek complementarities and synergies in their work at the regional and country levels. The agreement identified eight focus areas of collaboration, including: the facilitation by the resident coordinators of the involvement of the regional commissions in analytical and planning exercises by United Nations country teams, including in the common country assessment/United Nations Development Assistance Framework processes; the coordination of advisory services provided to Governments; collaboration in the follow-up to the implementation of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, at the regional level; development of regional knowledge-sharing networks; provision of regional and interregional technical cooperation; support to regional coordination mechanisms; joint staff training; and cooperation at global level, including within the United Nations Development Group on matters with a regional dimension. Both ECA and ECLAC have also signed memorandums of understanding with the respective regional bureaux of UNDP, identifying in more detail, the areas of collaboration and joint products in those regions and have initiated discussions with the bureaux to develop a management plan for implementing the memorandums. In addition, the regional commissions, through their New York Office, have been active in promoting the engagement of non-resident agencies in country-level development work, in particular through the work of the working group on non-resident agencies of the United Nations Development Group, which has been chaired by a representative of the New York office for the last two years. An assessment of the implementation of the action on non-resident agencies by the Group, during 2007, which is currently being prepared, should further enhance the involvement of the agencies and the regional commissions in country-level development work and ensure added value at the regional level.

60. At regional level, the regional commissions stepped up their efforts to further strengthen inter-agency collaboration through the regional coordination mechanisms, mandated by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1998/46 (annex III). During the reporting period, three regional commissions (ECA, ECLAC and ESCAP), convened their annual regional coordination mechanism meetings under the renewed chairmanship of the Deputy-Secretary-General. In the

ESCAP region, the mechanism has been meeting more frequently with both regular and ad hoc meetings. In a visit to ESCAP in December 2007, the Secretary-General himself chaired one of the meetings, during which he encouraged greater alignment and interaction between the mechanisms and the regional directors teams and further integration of the work of the non-resident and regional agencies in national processes in support of national development priorities. In their endeavour to seek complementarities and synergies between the regional coordination mechanisms and the regional directors teams and to promote more coherence in the work of the United Nations at the regional level, the commissions are currently undertaking a study, in consultation with their partners, on this matter. The commissions also participated in the most recent global meeting of the regional directors teams, held in March 2008, at which the importance of seeking complementarities between the work of the teams and of the Commissions was stressed and the participation of representatives of the commissions in the team meetings encouraged.

61. At the country level, the regional commissions have taken an active role in the United Nations system drive towards more coherence in delivering its services. ECA and ECLAC were part of the "delivering as one" initiative in Rwanda and Uruguay, respectively. The regional commissions with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and other non-resident agencies, are founding members of the newly established cluster on "trade and productive capacity of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB). The cluster was launched in the presence of the Secretary-General on the margins of the twelfth session of UNCTAD, held in Accra in April 2008. It represents a welcome initiative through which a number of non-resident agencies have teamed together to package their services and technical expertise in support of the growth agenda of developing countries, according to their priorities. In the meantime, the regional commissions continue to provide their advisory services in line with their competencies and in response to demands from the Governments of their member countries and to provide their technical assistance through the valuable resources of the United Nations regular programme of technical cooperation and the Development Account. The commissions are also actively pursuing their efforts to integrate the regional dimension in the common country assessment/United Nations Development Assistance Framework processes, in collaboration with the resident coordinator system and the United Nations country teams.

C. Interregional cooperation among the regional commissions

62. Since the last reporting period, the Executive Secretaries pursued their regular meetings and interactions to further coordination and collaboration among the five commissions, holding five meetings, including on the margins of the Economic and Social Council and the regular session of the General Assembly, as well as in relation to major events such as the United Nations Climate Change Conference, held in Bali, Indonesia, in December 2007, and the annual meeting of the regional commissions, held by the current coordinator, the Executive Secretary of ECA, in Addis Ababa, on 16 and 17 June 2008. The annual meetings of the regional commissions continue to prove their value and strategic importance to the work and positioning of the commissions in their endeavour to better serve member countries. Many initiatives highlighted in the present report owe their genesis and

implementation to those meetings, including: the active pursuit of the regional follow-up to the implementation of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals; the regional financing for development consultation meetings; collaboration on disaster risk assessment and management; and the strategic collaboration with UNDP and the regional directors teams. Furthermore, a number of high-level side events were organized, including on climate change at the Climate Change Conference and on the issue of aid for trade at the twelfth session of UNCTAD in Accra. Consultations are ongoing with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs on better collaboration to serve the new functions of the Economic and Social Council, notably the annual ministerial reviews and the Development Cooperation Forum, including through regional meetings in preparation for the global events.

63. The regional commissions also agreed to align the annual meetings of their chiefs of programme planning with the annual meetings of the Executive Secretaries organized by the current coordinator. At the last meeting of the chiefs of programme planning, hosted by ECE in October 2007, important issues relating to further harmonization and exchange of good practices among the commissions on matters related to programme planning, budget and management were discussed. The meetings have resulted in increased harmonization among the commissions in: applying results-based management, notably in monitoring and evaluation and the use of their technical advisory services; the development and implementation of Development Account projects; and knowledge management and publications. As the secretariat of the meetings of the Executive Secretaries, and through its participation in the meeting of chiefs of programme planning, the New York Office ensures follow-up to the decisions taken by the Executive Secretaries and feedback on relevant recommendations made by the chiefs. In February 2008, the Office launched a revamped website (www.un.org/regionalcommissions) as a corporate window for the Commissions at the global level.